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STATE FOR EUR/WE AND EUR/ERA

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SUBJECT: FM AMADO TRAVELS TO MIDDLE EAST IN EFFORT TO RAISE
PORTUGAL'S PROFILE

REF: LISBON 1743

Classified By: Classified by a/Pol/Econ Chief Cari Enav for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: FM Luis Amado will be traveling to Libya, Cairo and Amman the week of August 21 as part of Portugal's effort to play a larger role in the international arena, particularly in the Middle East, in the run-up to its EU Presidency during the latter half of 2007. Minister Amado plans to discuss the major regional issues - Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Lebanon, Hezbollah, Syria, and Iran - with his counterparts in Cairo and Amman. Talks in Libya will focus on opening a mission there. End Summary

¶2. (C) On August 17, MFA Middle East Desk Officer Fernando Brito outlined to A/Pol/Econ Chief the objectives of the Foreign Minister's Aug 21-23 visit to Cairo, Amman and Tripoli. He noted that Minister Amado will travel to Cairo to speak with officials there about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and solicit views on Hamas and Fatah. Brito commented that the EU was at a crossroads and would need to reconcile its views towards Hamas which it listed as a terrorist organization and towards Hezbollah which it did not. He noted that both organizations were represented in their respective governments, adding that in the former case, Hamas was the government. Brito underscored that the EU needed to figure out a way to deal with Hamas since he feared that isolating Hamas would only provide the organization with an excuse for its failures, allowing Hamas to blame its problems on the international community. Brito noted that Amado was also very interested in discussing the recent conflict in Lebanon and the way forward, especially in light of Portugal's intention to contribute to the UNIFIL mission there. (Ref A)

¶3. (C) Minister Amado will also solicit Egyptian officials' viewpoints on the agenda for the EU-Africa Summit Portugal is planning for its EU Presidency in the latter half of 2007. Brito noted that Egypt was very active in African affairs and had much to contribute. On the bilateral front, Amado will be seeking to strengthen ties between the diplomatic training institutes per a signed Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation in the field of diplomatic training.

¶4. (C) In Jordan, in addition to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, discussion will focus on Syria, Lebanon and Iran. Brito asserted that the Syrian regime was very weak and doing everything possible to remain in power. He described President Bashir el-Assad as a stooge of Iran which was working to consolidate its influence in the region. He commented that Jordan was very concerned about a possible upheaval in Damascus and its consequences for the region.

¶5. (SBU) The Foreign Minister is traveling to Tripoli to discuss opening a diplomatic mission there later this year. Portugal and Libya established relations in 1976, but Portugal's Ambassador currently resides in Tunis. Amado last traveled to Libya in October 2005 in his capacity as Defense Minister as part of an official delegation led by the Prime Minister.

¶6. (C) Comment: We are hearing a strong, consistent message from our Portuguese counterparts at the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defense - Portugal wants to play a greater role on the international stage, particularly in the Middle East where it enjoys good ties with many Arab nations. Furthermore, Portugal hopes to use its upcoming EU Presidency to get the EU off the sidelines and back in the BMENA game. FM Amado -- pro-U.S., deliberate and smart -- is doing his homework, reaching out to key players, and slowly building momentum in an effort to maximize the effectiveness of Portugal's presidency. Despite severe budgetary restraints, Portugal remains committed to participating in UN and NATO endeavors around the globe.

O'Neal